

**PALM SPRINGS-SOUTH COAST FIELD OFFICE
CALIFORNIA DESERT DISTRICT ADVISORY COUNCIL REPORT
June, 2010**

1. Energy Project Proposals

BLM Action: The BLM is processing several energy related proposals. Due to the current energy situation, considerable policy emphasis has been placed on expediting processes and timelines. The following is a summary of the major energy related proposals.

Contact: Cheryl Martinez, Acting Supv., Lands, Minerals & Recreation 760-833-7147

Desert Southwest 500 kV Transmission Line Project:

Project proponent: Imperial Irrigation District.

Status: This project is for a major electrical transmission line located between Blythe and western Coachella Valley. Grants issued early September, 2007 and plans for development are being finalized with a possible near-term start date for all or portions of the project.

Devers-Palo Verde #2 500 kV Transmission Line Project:

Project proponent: Southern California Edison (SCE);

Co-lead: California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)

Status: This project involved a proposed 500 kV electrical transmission line originating west of Phoenix, AZ and ending in Romoland, CA, using an alignment through Kofa Refuge in Arizona and following Interstate 10 through California. Final EIR/EIS was issued in November, 2006 and the project was approved by the CPUC. The BLM Record of Decision was pending resolution of issues involving project approval by the Arizona Corporation Commission which had rejected the project on May 30, 2007. However, SCE has now removed the Arizona portion of the project from consideration. The CPUC is modifying their permitting to authorize only the California portion of the project. The BLM is preparing the Record of Decision with a final decision likely in July, 2010.

Blythe Energy 230 kV Transmission Line Project:

Project proponent: Blythe Energy LLC;

Co-leads: California Energy Commission (CEC) and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA)

Status: Project involves construction of 230 kV line from Blythe to the Julian Hines Substation, near Desert Center; located within the

I-10 utility corridor. Grant issued July, 2007, the development plan is approved and construction is completed.

Green Path North 500 kV Transmission Line Project:

Project proponent: Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP).

Status: Project is cancelled by LADWP. The purpose of the project was for a 500kV electrical transmission line to connect renewable energy sources in Imperial Valley with LADWP facilities in the Victorville/Hisperia areas, San Bernardino County, California vicinity. Various route alternatives were being analyzed through an EIS/EIR process and both BLM and San Bernadino National Forest staffs were working with LADWP on the analysis of the routes. Proposal was in the very early stages of processing with both public scoping and EIS preparation not initiated.

Wind Energy:

Project proponent: various.

Status: We oversee 21 wind energy rights-of-way grants including processing r/w applications and assignments, assessing and monitoring cost recovery accounts, completing environmental reviews, and issuing notices and decisions. Our most recent projects include:

- In 2008, we authorized BP Wind Energy North America Inc. to remove 139 old and inefficient wind turbines on Edom Hill in Coachella Valley that collectively generated 10.9 megawatts (MW) and replace them with eight new, state-of-the-art Clipper Liberty 2.5 MW turbines that generate 20 MW.
- We also processed an application for the Mountain View Wind Partners "Section 28" re-power project located just north of Palm Springs proper involving preparation of a joint EIS/EIR with the City of Palm Springs, issued in February, 2007. The final EIS/EIR was released 11/7/08. A Record of Decision was issued on 2/5/09 and the Right of Way Grant was issued in early March, 2009. Project components: 42 to 50 wind turbines on public and private lands with a total generating capacity of 49 megawatts, access roads, a 34.5kV powerline and an electrical substation.

Solar Energy:

Project proponent: various.

Status: We are processing multiple applications for solar energy projects as part of the District-wide process. Applications involve

approximately 140,000 acres in the Palm Springs, Desert Center and Blythe areas and are in the early stages of processing involving submission and review of their respective plans of development and initiating environmental analyses. Our most recent actions:

Blythe Solar Power Project

Solar Millennium, LLC and Chevron Energy Solutions propose to construct, own, and operate the Blythe Solar Power Project. The project is a concentrated solar thermal electric generating facility with four adjacent, independent, and identical solar plants of 250 megawatt (MW) nominal capacity each for a total capacity of about 1,000 MW nominal. The Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Staff Assessment for the Chevron Energy Solutions/Solar Millennium (CESSM) Blythe Solar Power Plant (BSPP) was published April 6, 2010. The Final EIS is in preparation.

Palen Solar Power Project

Solar Millennium, LLC and Chevron Energy Solutions propose to construct, own, and operate the Palen Solar Power Project. The project would be a concentrated solar thermal electric generating facility with two adjacent, independent, and identical solar plants of 250 megawatts (MW) capacity each for a total capacity of 500 MW. The Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Staff Assessment for the Chevron Energy Solutions/Solar Millennium Palen Solar Power Plant (PSPP) was published April 7, 2010. The Final EIS is in preparation.

NextEra - Ford Dry Lake (Genesis) Solar Project

Genesis Solar LLC, a Delaware limited liability company and wholly owned subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources LLC, proposes to construct, own, and operate the Genesis Solar Energy Project consisting of two independent solar electric generating facilities with a nominal net electrical output of 125 megawatts (MW) each, for a total net electrical output of 250 MW. Electrical power would be produced using steam turbine generators fed from solar steam generators. The solar steam generators receive heated transfer fluid from solar thermal equipment comprised of arrays of parabolic mirrors that collect energy from the sun. The Staff Assessment/Draft EIS was released for public review in March, 2010; the final EIS is now in preparation.

Desert Sunlight Solar Farm

First Solar Development, Inc. (First Solar) proposes to construct and operate a 550-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) power plant project known as the Desert Sunlight Solar Farm (DSSF or Project). The DSSF would include three main components 1) the Solar Farm site, 2) a transmission line, and 3) a Southern California Edison (SCE) owned and operated substation, Red Bluff Substation. The NOI was published 1/13/10 and the draft EIS is in preparation.

For additional information on these and the other pending projects, see:

http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings/Solar_Projects.html
<http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings.html>

2. Off-Highway Vehicle Green Sticker Grant Program

BLM Action: Install signage and provide information to the public regarding riding opportunities in the Palm Springs Field Office. Conduct restoration work to repair OHV intrusions into closed areas.

Contact: Cheryl Martinez, Acting Supv., Lands, Minerals & Recreation
760-833-7147

Agency Roles: State Off Highway Vehicle Commission – Project funding through grants; Student Conservation Association – Restoration field work.

Status: Grants were provided to BLM Palm Springs in 2008-10 for ongoing restoration work, outreach, enforcement and signage conducted in the Mecca Hills, Dos Palmas, Big Morongo ACEC, and Coachella Valley Preserve.

3. Santa Rosa/San Jacinto Mountains Recreation Trails Planning

BLM Action: Preparation of a coordinated recreation trails plan that provides recreational opportunities and minimizes risk of impacts to the federally-listed Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep

Contact: Jim Foote, Monument Manager, Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument (760) 833-7136

Agency Roles: Bureau of Land Management – cooperator on EIS
Coachella Valley Association of Governments – CEQA lead

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – NEPA lead
Cities of the Coachella Valley, Riverside County, others –
permittees

Status:

Due to the mix of land ownership, this trails plan was conceived as a collaborative effort, and is part of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) process. In coordination with the local jurisdictions through the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG), BLM jointly conducted public scoping sessions and coordination meetings to obtain public input based on two goals: 1) provide opportunities for trail use, and 2) minimize risk of impacts to the federally-listed Peninsular Ranges bighorn sheep from recreational activities. Interim measures are in place, promulgated from the Biological Opinion for the California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment for the Coachella Valley (2002). BLM currently relies primarily on a *voluntary* trail avoidance program.

The Draft Environmental Impact Report/Statement (EIR/EIS) for the CVMSHCP and trails plan was released for a 90-day public comment period in November, 2004. Public meetings were held in November, December, 2004 and January, 2005. The comment period was extended for one month to March 7, 2005. Numerous comments were received opposing a proposed trail permit system. Comments were addressed in the Final EIR/EIS with the proposed trail plan being modified to the satisfaction of most respondents.

The CVAG Executive Committee released the Final EIR/EIS to the various signatory agencies in early February 2006 for approval. About four months later, the City of Desert Hot Springs rejected the CVMSHCP. Since the plan requires approval of *all* permittees for it to take effect, CVAG initiated preparation of a recirculated draft plan, including the trails plan, along with a recirculated draft EIR and supplemental final EIS. The recirculated draft plan, which excludes lands within the City of Desert Hot Springs, was released for a 60-day public comment period in mid-March 2007.

On September 10, 2007, the CVAG Executive Committee released the Final Recirculated CVMSHCP and Final Recirculated EIR/Supplemental Final EIS to the various signatory agencies for approval. The trails plan element is essentially the same as proposed in the February 2006 Final EIR/EIS. The CVMSHCP was approved October 1, 2008. The Federal side of the trails plan will be approved subject to issuance of a biological opinion by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). No schedule has been established by the FWS for completion of this biological opinion.

4. Water Projects: Implement Canal Lining Projects as part of PL100-675

BLM Action: PL 100-675 established the All American and Coachella Canal Lining Projects and commits the federal government to providing potential habitat creation/restoration sites and groundwater from public lands to help meet project environmental requirements. The Dos Palmas ACEC is a focus area for these efforts.

Contact: John Kalish, Field Manager, (760) 833-7103

Agency Roles: BLM, BOR, Coachella Valley Water District, San Luis Rey Indian Water Rights Settlement Parties & San Diego Water Authority

Status: In cooperation with the above parties, BLM is implementing an assistance agreement that includes BLM managing the restoration of 352 acres of desert riparian habitat, making lands available for the creation of 17 acre marsh/aquatic habitat, preserving 105 acres of marsh/aquatic habitat, acquisition of up to 875 acres of additional lands within the ACEC, and long-term management of these projects.

5. Status of Route Signing; Palm Springs - South Coast Field Office

BLM Action: All primary routes within the NECO planning area are signed with 4 x 4 steel posts consistent with the CDD sign policy. All major intersections have kiosks with maps. Secondary roads in the NECO area are not funded or signed at this time. Routes within the Coachella Valley planning area are not signed due to intermix of public and private lands, (i.e. locked gates, low mileage public route segments, not useful to the public.) The South Coast planning area is not signed but route inventory and designation for the Border Mountains area of San Diego County is being done as part of the on-going South Coast Resource Management Plan Revision.

Contact: Greg Hill, Planning and Environmental Coordinator (760) 833-7140

6. Riparian Restoration Activities Update – Palm Springs South Coast Field Office

Inventory: Approximately 2000 acres are annually inventoried for ecological condition. Habitats include stream corridors, mountain and desert oasis, and other desert riparian communities. Riparian Assessments review avian riparian species present, noxious weed infestations, disturbances etc.

Acres restored: Approximately 250 acres are annually treated; techniques include:

Manual: Hand pulling isolated noxious weed infestations such as sahara mustard, Mexican tree tobacco, Saltcedar.

Mechanical: Chainsaw, dozer use for removal of Saltcedar

Chemical: Herbicide cut stumps of Saltcedar

Biological: Excessive aquatic vegetation removal within sensitive desert oasis using sterile Grass Carp in Dos Palmas ponds. The vast majority of the restoration is with the removal of Tamarisk (Saltcedar). Once the saltcedar is removed the existing native seed bank responds quickly re-establishing itself as does the water table.

Locations: Numerous locations, including ACECs Dos Palmas, Big Morongo, Edom Hill/ Willow Hole; isolated oasis within the Santa Rosa's including Boo Hoff, Blazdale Canyon, Bear Creek, Magnesia Springs, Cathedral Canyon, Dead Indian Canyon drainages etc.

Partners: Numerous partners continually work together to inventory, treat, educate and restore riparian communities. Recently a Lower Desert Weed Management Area was established further augmenting coordination and collaboration and pooling of resources for Riparian Projects.

Coachella Valley Mountain Conservancy
 Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians
 California Dept of Fish and Game
 College of the Desert Biology Class
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 U. of California Riverside
 U.S. Forest Service
 U.S. Geological Survey
 Friends of Big Morongo
 California Native Plant Society RSB chapter
 Center for Natural Lands Management

Contact: Greg Hill, Planning and Environmental Coordinator (760) 833-7140

7. **Border Activities/Issues – Palm Springs South Coast Field Office**

BLM Action: San Diego Sector of the Border Patrol has four Field Stations, plus

the Headquarters Office and is responsible for San Diego County and a slice of western Imperial County. This sector is experiencing an increase in apprehensions in fiscal year 2010 with the largest increases in the El Cajon and Boulevard areas. The BLM coordinates closely with the Border Patrol in initiatives to protect resources and the public including construction of the border fence in the Otay and Tecate vicinities.

Contact: John Kalish, Field Manager 76-833-7100

8. Planned Revision of the South Coast Resource Management Plan (RMP)

BLM Action: This plan, encompassing public lands in western Riverside and San Diego Counties as well as Los Angeles County and the southwestern portion of San Bernardino County, has been in effect since May, 1994. Scoping meetings were held on the plan revision in late calendar, 2007 and the draft plan revision is scheduled for release to the public in summer 2010.

The purpose of the plan revision is to update the South Coast Resource Management Plan to: 1) ensure consistency to the extent possible with the various multi-species planning efforts and partnership agreements in South Coast region, 2) re-evaluate management direction in light of new land acquisitions, information, and change in circumstances, 3) assess the impact of BLM management on threatened and endangered species listed since 1993 through formal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and 4) assess energy related needs of the region and meet the objectives of the President's energy plan.

Contact: Greg Hill, Planning and Environmental Coordinator (760) 833-7140

Agency Roles: Bureau of Land Management: lead on revision of land use plan.

Status: Data gathering in 2007-2008, planned ROD in 2010.

9. Volunteers

BLM Action: The office promotes volunteerism in a wide range of public land management initiatives. This program is mainly focused around management of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument and the Big Morongo Canyon ACEC/Preserve. Extensive volunteer programs within the Monument are developed by the Friends of the Desert Mountains and are outlined on their website:

<http://www.desertmountains.org/volunteer.html>

Extensive volunteer programs within the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve are developed by the Friends of Big Morongo Canyon Preserve and are outlined on their web site:

<http://www.bigmorongo.org/a8Volunteer.htm>

Other volunteer efforts are implemented throughout the year including habitat restoration, clean-ups, archaeological site monitoring and facility development/maintenance. These volunteer programs and contributions are invaluable in effectively managing our lands and programs. Of special note, offering high quality environmental education and interpretation programs to the public and schools is dependant on these volunteer contributions.

Contact: John Kalish, Field Manager (760) 833-7103

Agency Roles: Coordinate with the 2 Friends groups as well as organize other on-going volunteer programs/projects.

Status: On-going.